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Chairman: Mr. AL-SHAALI (United Arab Emirates)

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AGENDA ITEM 97: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/43/3 (chap. VII, sect. H) and Add.1, A/46/12 and Add.1, A/46/134 and Corr.1, A/46/139, A/46/323-S/22836, A/46/344, 371, 428-435, 471, 501/Rev.1, 568, 612)

1. Mrs. SURAPOLBHICHET (Thailand) said that, despite the High Commissioner's laudable efforts in the global refugee crisis, the longstanding refugee problems in some regions should not be ignored because of overriding crises elsewhere. With regard to recent trends in South-East Asia, her delegation hoped that the new approach would produce a lasting solution to the 16-year-old Indo-Chinese refugee problem in Thailand by forestalling the problem of stranded non-refugees.

2. Thanks to the cooperation of the countries of origin and the tireless efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), repatriation had become a realistic and desirable solution. In the case of the Lao refugee problem, for example, the Fourth Tripartite Thai/Lao/UNHCR meeting in Luang Prabang in June 1991 had agreed on the outline of a three-year plan of action for the phased repatriation and reintegration of the 60,000 Lao in Thailand, which called for the enhancement of Lao capability to absorb returnees, a campaign to encourage long stayers to volunteer to return home, and education and training programmes for returnees.

3. Regarding the Vietnamese refugee problem, she welcomed the progress in implementing the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees adopted at the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees held in Geneva in 1989, but regretted that the number of voluntary returnees had failed to keep pace with the number of determined non-refugees or with the increasing camp population. A continuous influx of Vietnamese into neighbouring countries, including Thailand, coupled with the low rate of voluntary repatriation, had aggravated the problem. Preventive measures to deter outflows at the source were vital. Failure to implement the Plan in its entirety would increase the burden on countries of temporary refuge, such as Thailand. The Lao repatriation plan might serve as a blueprint for Vietnamese repatriation.

4. With the settlement of the Cambodian question, the 360,000 Cambodians being sheltered in Thailand had high hopes of returning home and Thailand would continue to cooperate in their repatriation. Programmes to prepare them for their eventual return as productive and responsible citizens had been received with enthusiasm. However, while repatriation was the immediate task, land redevelopment would be essential to turn deserted camp sites to productive use. That, too, would require international support.

5. Mrs. DINH THI MINH HUYEN (Viet Nam) said that any durable solution to the refugee situation must take into account the fact that refugees were becoming mixed with persons fleeing in search of a better life, and it must combine refugee aid with development assistance for effective reintegration.

6. In South-East Asia, the countries concerned were making intensive efforts to implement the Comprehensive Plan of Action. The Vietnamese Government was carrying out a number of measures, including a mass information campaign to discourage illegal departures; punishment for organizers of illegal departures; expansion of the Orderly Departure Programme; and promoting the reception of voluntary repatriates in dignity, order and safety.

7. Those measures, together with assistance from UNHCR, donor countries and the countries concerned, had resulted in a noticeable decrease in illegal departures and an increase in voluntary repatriations. In that connection, her delegation highly appreciated the reintegration assistance offered by the Commission of European Communities within the framework of the Comprehensive Plan of Action, as an example of combining returnee aid with development assistance for effective reintegration. Concerted efforts must be maintained by countries of first asylum, countries of origin and resettlement, donor countries, UNHCR, and international, governmental and non-governmental organizations to ensure the success of the Plan. Viet Nam firmly opposed forced repatriation.

8. Successive wars of aggression and the ongoing embargo against Viet Nam had contributed heavily to the ravaged economy that had prompted many Vietnamese to flee. The outflow of Vietnamese people would not be stemmed until those hostile policies were ended and Viet Nam could once again pursue its economic development.

9. Mr. OUNPHATHAI (Lao People's Democratic Republic) paid a tribute to UNHCR for its tireless efforts, despite shortage of staff and budget, and hoped that more resources would be made available.

10. His Government believed that voluntary repatriation was the most desirable solution to the refugee problem. It had always asserted that the Lao refugees in Thailand could return home in dignity and total safety if they so wished. It was in a position to repatriate 300 returnees a month, which could be increased to 500 with additional UNHCR assistance. To date, some 7,500 persons had returned to Laos with assistance from the Office, including 1,500 who had returned voluntarily during 1990, and an estimated 30,000 had returned of their own volition and by their own means. With the growing number of requests for voluntary repatriation and the improved relations between his country and Thailand, many Lao refugees still in camps in Thailand would probably choose to return home. His Government welcomed the agreement reached at the Fourth Tripartite Thai/Lao/UNHCR meeting in Luang Prabang in June 1991, on a new repatriation plan; and the agreement reached at the First Tripartite China/Lao/UNHCR meeting in Kunming in July 1991, on the repatriation of Lao refugees and asylum-seekers and the return of 4,000 Lao living in southern China.

(Mr. Ounphathai, Lao People's Democratic Republic)

11. His delegation thanked UNHCR for its valuable assistance and the Thai Government for its cooperation in measures to facilitate voluntary repatriation. It also thanked the member countries of the European Community, the Japanese Government and the international institutions and non-governmental organizations which had provided UNHCR with financial resources for implementing the programme in his country.

12. Mr. BANDARA (Sri Lanka) said that his delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's three-pronged approach to the refugee problem. He noted from paragraph 7 of the Secretary-General's report (A/46/568) that several United Nations agencies already operated early-warning systems in their areas of competence or maintained databases that could provide useful information for early warning, and said his delegation would like to see a well-coordinated early-warning system which could take care of the needs of all United Nations agencies.

13. The majority of refugees came from the third world and many of them could not claim asylum on the basis of persecution as defined by the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees. He suggested that countries which generated "economic refugees" should be given massive development aid to enable them to provide satisfactory living conditions for their citizens.

14. He was pleased to note from the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/46/12) that the Office was focusing on inter-agency cooperation, which would enhance the agencies' capacity to deal with refugee-related questions and lead to better utilization of resources. He urged that public information programmes, which had increased awareness of refugee issues and would facilitate the Office's activities, should be carried out on a continuing basis.

15. The Government greatly appreciated the assistance provided to the large number of displaced persons and returnees in Sri Lanka by UNHCR and Médecins Sans Frontières.

16. Mr. RADZI (Malaysia) said that, while the ending of the cold war had been expected to bring global peace, UNHCR paradoxically faced a dramatic increase in the number of refugees world wide. His delegation was pleased to note that UNHCR was gearing itself to meet the challenges of the 1990s, through a three-pronged strategy of prevention, emergency response and durable solutions. However, it failed to see how UNHCR could directly address the root causes without expanding its mandate and without duplicating the services provided by other agencies. It recognized that UNHCR involvement was warranted under certain circumstances, provided that its activities were coordinated closely with those of other agencies and that it acted with the consent of the country concerned.

(Mr. Radzi, Malaysia)

17. The High Commissioner's recommendation to strengthen the Office's emergency-response capacity was timely and would contribute to the overall objective of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations.

18. His delegation agreed with the High Commissioner that voluntary repatriation was the most desirable solution. Yet, in order for that solution to be viable, the conditions causing forced flight had to be eliminated. While that task was primarily the responsibility of the Government concerned, the international community could play a role by helping to restore a stable environment and by facilitating the reintegration of returnees. UNHCR, in coordination with other United Nations agencies, could provide short-term assistance; other agencies could then contribute to the longer-term process of national development.

19. His delegation welcomed the successful conclusion of the Paris Conference on Cambodia and reaffirmed its support for the leading role to be played by UNHCR in repatriation efforts, which should be carried out under conditions of safety and dignity. He hoped that the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese refugees would herald an end to the exodus of Vietnamese boat people, who should be repatriated rapidly.

20. Mr. ILDEPHONSE (Rwanda) said that the problem of refugees concerned Rwanda on two counts: it was both a host country and a source of refugees. However, armed aggression against Rwanda carried out by exile groups hostile to the democratic regime and supported by other countries was undermining efforts to repatriate the refugees. Notwithstanding the lies spread by those responsible for the hostilities, Rwanda had long endeavoured to find a lasting solution. It had created a Ministry for Refugees and had, with the assistance of international organizations, placed displaced persons in special settlements. His Government had repeatedly called for the peaceful return of refugees to Rwanda. It had strongly encouraged voluntary repatriation and had entered into bilateral and multilateral negotiations with the countries hosting Rwandese refugees and with international organizations. It was regrettable that his country had been invaded by groups from Uganda in October 1990, just when Rwanda and Uganda had been negotiating a settlement of the problem of Rwandese refugees in Uganda, which could have provided the basis for resolving the problem of Rwandese refugees elsewhere. The settlement would have included determination of the wishes of Rwandese refugees and an exploratory visit to Rwanda by a group of refugees.

21. Rwanda was not discouraged, however. UNHCR and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) were currently finalizing a Plan of Action for a lasting solution to the Rwandese refugee problem, to be submitted to a donor conference early in 1992. His Government was taking steps to prepare for the return of the refugees and had just adopted a law on general amnesty.

(Mr. Ildephonse, Rwanda)

22. He appealed to the international community to provide the financial assistance needed to implement the proposed Plan of Action. Furthermore, since repatriation could not succeed under conditions of war, he urged Rwanda's aggressors and their supporters to choose dialogue rather than violence and thereby restore peace to the region.

23. Mr. ADALA (Kenya) said that the unprecedented deterioration of the global refugee situation posed daunting challenges which required imaginative responses. It was necessary to identify the reasons that forced people to flee in order to prevent problems of displacement in the countries of origin. However, there had been encouraging trends in various parts of Africa. The Ethiopian situation had stabilized and continued to improve after three decades of conflict, making it possible to resettle refugees and displaced persons.

24. Kenya, as host to several thousand refugees from neighbouring countries, was very much aware of their plight, particularly that of the most vulnerable groups. That had placed an enormous burden on Kenya, which did not have enough resources to cope. It was gratifying to note that the Organization had responded promptly to the plight of the refugees from neighbouring States by establishing a special emergency programme for the Horn of Africa in order to coordinate responses and mobilize resources from the international community. His Government would continue to cooperate to the fullest extent with the United Nations system to provide assistance to those refugees.

25. In July 1990, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development had issued a declaration on peace, stability and development in the Horn of Africa calling for the non-use of force, the peaceful settlement of disputes between States, and support for each other's efforts to bring about peaceful solutions to internal problems. The States members of that body hoped that the strict observance of those principles would lower tension in the region and thereby greatly reduce the refugee problem. He commended the success achieved in southern Africa by strengthening the economies of the States in that region and hoped that similar assistance would be provided to the countries in the Horn of Africa. Both individual Governments and the international community must be totally involved in order to solve the refugee problem. Peace and stability must be strengthened to prevent further refugee flows. He hoped that the international community would respond speedily to the appeal by the Secretary-General for assistance for the special emergency programme for the Horn of Africa.

26. Mr. AIT CHAALAL (Algeria) said that the humanitarian structure set up after the Second World War must be adapted to meet new challenges resulting from social and economic deprivation, a major cause of mass population movements. A commendable effort had been made by expanding the mandate of UNHCR to provide protection to other groups of persons affected by war or civil disturbances in their own countries. The international community must continue in that direction and prevent any restrictive interpretation of the

(Mr. Ait Chaalal, Algeria)

definition of refugees set forth in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The right of asylum should be based on the principle of human solidarity and the indisputable link between protection of refugees and human rights.

27. Third-world countries, particularly in Africa, bore the brunt of the burden of assisting refugees. They were the least able to cope with massive influxes because of inadequate infrastructure, chronic food shortages, health problems and a very unfavourable economic situation. The principles of collective international responsibility and equitable burden-sharing therefore must not be ignored any longer. If those countries did not receive adequate aid from the international community, they would be unable to carry out their duty in accordance with human solidarity and would be condemned to further poverty, instability and conflicts, which would in turn cause more mass outflows.

28. Algeria was providing asylum and assistance to Saharan refugees with the support of UNHCR and various forms of international aid. As indicated in the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/46/12), within the framework of a political settlement of the Western Sahara question by the organization of a referendum, an initial repatriation plan had been adopted and all necessary measures were being taken to prepare for that operation.

29. Development was essential in order to prevent new exoduses and resolve existing situations. In addition to equitable burden-sharing, greater cooperation with the most prosperous countries in such areas as foreign debt, trade relations and development assistance would help the poorest countries cope with existing situations and avert new refugee movements. Owing to the end of the cold war, considerable funds could be allocated to social services, including those for refugees. Even taking into account the cost of weapons-reduction measures, it should be possible to use part of the resources freed to finance development. There was a need to lay down a clear policy on asylum for refugees and resolve to promote the development of the world's underprivileged. Lastly, he stressed that the international community must take steps to overcome the financial constraints facing UNHCR in order to enable it to carry out its noble mission.

30. Ms. HASSAN (Somalia) said that the favourable global political climate provided a unique opportunity for solving many of the thorny problems in the world, including the question of refugees. The refugee problem had created enormous hardships for developing and least developed countries in addition to their already precarious economic situation. In spite of Somalia's fragile infrastructure, it had been providing assistance to over a million refugees for more than a decade. In the past year, however, the civil war had led to an exodus of Somalis to neighbouring countries. The war had left Somalia in ruins. In many parts of the country, even essentials such as water, shelter and medical care, were no longer available. About two million people were reportedly displaced, and at least 4.5 million people had been directly affected by the conflict.

(Ms. Hassan, Somalia)

31. Her delegation was greatly encouraged by the statement in the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to refugees in Somalia (A/46/471) that, owing to favourable conditions for the voluntary repatriation of the Somali refugees from eastern Ethiopia to north-west Somalia, the prospect of a durable solution for that large group of refugees in Ethiopia appeared within reach. It was therefore heartening to note that UNHCR was finalizing an emergency assistance programme for reintegration of the Somalis in refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia, and that the Office was fully committed to assist in implementing the programme.

32. The same repatriation facilities should, however, be extended to the other Somali refugees in neighbouring countries who wished to return to their regions of origin, and similar facilities should be provided for the reintegration of the large number of displaced persons within Somalia. A lasting solution would be possible only when favourable conditions were established for voluntary repatriation. All other humanitarian efforts were at best stop-gap measures.

33. She expressed sincere appreciation to the various United Nations organizations, particularly UNHCR and the World Food Programme, for the emergency assistance provided to Somali returnees from Ethiopia and the large number of Somali nationals in neighbouring countries. The generous contribution provided by Japan was commendable.

34. The report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/46/12) described the desperate situation in her country. In view of the further deterioration of that situation, the need for greater international humanitarian assistance in helping Somalia cope with refugees and displaced persons was even more urgent. Her delegation therefore once again appealed for greater international assistance in that humanitarian cause.

35. Mr. KASOULIDES (Cyprus) said that a better understanding of the root causes of the refugee problem should make it possible to prevent the endless uprooting of millions of people forced to alleviate the burden on developing countries with scant resources and widespread poverty. The first priority should be to strengthen United Nations mechanisms and procedures to avert conflict, negotiate solutions to international conflicts and improve the human rights situation in certain countries.

36. States must fulfil their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, respect the human rights of their own nationals and comply with Security Council resolutions. His delegation agreed with the view that national sovereignty should not be used as a justification for depriving internally displaced persons of international assistance. The efforts to establish an early-warning system to avert possible refugee flows would contribute to effective long-term strategies to deal with the problem. His delegation welcomed the increased attention given to women and children refugees and the special measures adopted for their protection.

(Mr. Kasoulides, Cyprus)

37. Continued cooperation between UNHCR and development agencies would lead to a more constructive division of labour and reinforce the linkage between refugee assistance and development aid. Voluntary repatriation was the ideal solution and should be accompanied by measures to reintegrate returnees into their societies, ensure acceptable economic and political conditions and guarantee security. In a number of countries, there were hopeful signs that refugees would be able to return. That inevitably increased the need for human and financial resources. His delegation was therefore deeply concerned at the budget crisis affecting UNHCR and stressed that further resources must be found to enhance the capability of the countries concerned to provide asylum and arrange for resettlement.

38. The definition of a refugee was losing its focus because of the massive flows of people fleeing poverty, environmental disaster and underdevelopment.

39. It was time for the United Nations to focus more closely on the issue of internally displaced persons, who remained outside the protection of international instruments. It would be useful to distinguish between persons displaced owing to domestic events within a State and refugees who had been forcibly expelled from parts of their country following foreign interference and occupation. His delegation drew attention in that context to the continued plight of Cyprus. Following the invasion by Turkey in 1974, more than one third of the population of Cyprus had been forcibly uprooted from their ancestral homes and had become refugees in their own country. Seventeen years later, the occupation forces were still standing between them and their homes, many of which had been given to the large numbers of illegal settlers brought from Turkey in an effort to change the demographic structure of the occupied territory.

40. In recognition of the urgent problems that displaced persons faced in cases of foreign invasion and occupation, the Secretary-General continued to employ a special UNHCR mission in Cyprus to coordinate relief efforts. His delegation was grateful to the international community, donor countries and UNHCR for their work in alleviating the plight of refugees and displaced persons on both sides of an artificial dividing line that kept Greek and Turkish Cypriots apart by force despite their having coexisted peacefully for centuries. The return of the refugees to their rightful homes was the sine qua non of a durable solution to the Cyprus problem. His delegation supported the mission of good offices entrusted to the Secretary-General under Security Council resolution 716 (1991) and would continue to make every effort to reach a settlement that guaranteed the right of the refugees to return to their ancestral homes.

41. Mr. VETTER VON DER LILIE (Austria) said that recent changes in the international political climate should help eliminate some of the root causes of forced flight and bring about lasting solutions to certain long-standing refugee problems. None the less, persisting economic difficulties, rising

(Mr. Vetter von der Lilie, Austria)

unemployment, man-made and natural disasters, human rights violations and local conflicts continued to cause massive migratory flows.

42. It was essential to make a clear distinction between migrants and refugees. Policy should be elaborated with the following objectives in mind: prevention of new flows and stemming of existing ones; development of an international strategy based on international cooperation in social and economic development and the promotion of human rights; the need for countries of origin to take responsibility for the general welfare of their nationals; progressive development of international law relating to State responsibility for refugee problems; development of a monitoring plan to identify potential refugee situations; and the setting up in countries of origin of information systems on the status of refugees in host countries. It was with those objectives in mind that his Government had hosted in January 1991 a Council of Europe conference of ministers on the movement of persons from Central and Eastern European countries, the recommendations of which were being implemented.

43. Permanent solutions to refugee problems were still needed. Accordingly, his country welcomed the recent accession to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol of several Central and Eastern European countries. It supported the High Commissioner's strategy aimed at strengthening preventive measures and the emergency preparedness and response mechanism, and endorsed her decision to accord priority to voluntary repatriation, which was generally the best solution and often the only one.

44. His Government particularly commended the High Commissioner's emphasis on the needs of internally displaced persons, since their own countries were frequently unable or unwilling to assist them. Displaced persons did not receive protection under international agreements and their presence could be a destabilizing factor. The problem required a coordinated effort by countries, international and non-governmental organizations. Austria was particularly concerned by the spiral of violence and bloodshed in Yugoslavia. His Government had decided to allocate nearly $2 million to assist Yugoslav refugees in Austria; it had earmarked an additional $100,000 for UNHCR programmes in Hungary.

45. He drew attention to the fourth conference of European ministers responsible for migration affairs, held in Luxembourg in September 1991, which had proposed the setting up of an urgent relief system to deal with the problems of mass refugee flows.

46. UNHCR had made considerable progress in integrating the problems of refugee women and children and was determined to pursue that course.

47. Measures were also needed at the national level, including quicker screening processes, the rapid elimination of individuals without genuine claims to refugee status and the harmonization of refugee-status determination

(Mr. Vetter von der Lilie, Austria)

procedures among countries. With that in mind, his Government had recently proposed new legislation concerning asylum. He paid tribute to the High Commissioner for the leadership and flexibility she displayed in fulfilling her challenging mandate and assured her of Austria's wholehearted support.

48. Mr. FISSENKO (Belarus) recalled that, following the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station, the term "environmental refugee" had come into use, such refugees numbering in the tens of thousands. His delegation hoped that international assistance to help Belarus face that terrible disaster would continue. That need underscored the importance of the work of UNHCR.

49. Although Belarus had not yet acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, it had participated as an observer in the latest session of UNHCR's Executive Committee. It was pleased that the Executive Committee had focused on ways of adapting UNHCR to the needs of a rapidly changing world. His Government agreed with the High Commissioner who, at that session, had stressed that the crumbling of the Berlin Wall had been one of the most significant events symbolizing the end of the cold war, and that building walls was no answer against those who felt compelled to flee. The answer, she had said, should be to build bridges, allowing democracy, human rights and prosperity to spread, and she had committed UNHCR to a course that would lead to a more open and just world order in which many refugees would find their way back home and no one would be forced to flee. Belarus also subscribed to the comment by the Chairman of the Executive Committee on the need to review and improve mechanisms for providing humanitarian relief in emergencies.

50. Concerning the decisions and conclusions of the Executive Committee, his delegation supported the intention of vigorously promoting existing protection principles and debate on new directions for protection, the call to explore new options for preventive strategies and ways in which State responsibility and burden-sharing mechanisms might be strengthened, and the request to reinforce efforts to encourage or promote voluntary repatriation of refugees to the countries of origin. Belarus endorsed the Executive Committee's call to support the High Commissioner's efforts to promote universal accession to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and welcomed its willingness to coordinate its activities with other related organizations, to assist international human rights bodies in their work and, in particular, its intention to participate actively in preparing the World Conference on Human Rights.

51. His Government attached particular importance to the conclusions on refugee women and children and endorsed the Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women.

(Mr. Fissenko, Belarus)

52. It was essential to take urgent measures to address the serious problem of refugee children. A better coordination of efforts must be achieved on the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in accordance with the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s. UNHCR must cooperate with the United Nations Children's Fund and other relevant organizations in implementing the Guidelines on Refugee Children. The standards set forth in the Guidelines must serve as a basis for UNHCR programme planning and budget preparation.

53. Mr. IMANALIEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that, in a world in which international relations were rapidly shedding their politicized overtones, UNHCR must take on a central role in promoting international humanitarian cooperation.

54. UNHCR had shown increasing effectiveness in providing assistance to the estimated 17 million refugees worldwide, thanks in part to structural changes in the Office. UNHCR had assisted 1.5 million Iraqi refugees with unprecedented speed. It had signed an agreement with the Government of South Africa, setting the stage for its presence in that country and opening the way to the safe return of refugees and displaced persons. UNHCR staff was carrying out difficult and, at times, dangerous work in the Horn of Africa, and the Office was increasing its efforts in the defence of refugees and repatriates in Djibouti, Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi, the Sudan, Liberia and other African countries. It would be hard to overstate the importance of its mission as the leading body involved in the voluntary repatriation to Cambodia, where, following the signing of the Paris agreements, the prospects for a durable and comprehensive settlement of the refugee problem had grown. UNHCR was continuing its efforts to implement the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees, and the Office had also completed successful work in Latin America, jointly organizing the International Conference on Central American Refugees. Following the Plan of Action adopted at the Conference, many refugees were returning home. UNHCR's work would, however, be greatly simplified if it could coordinate its activities with other refugee organizations at all levels.

55. UNHCR's role had taken on increased prominence in Eastern and Central Europe. His Government appreciated its assistance in drafting national legislation and procedures concerning refugees, training specialists on legal aspects of the question and establishing action plans for emergency situations. Meeting in Moscow, a UNHCR delegation, members of non-governmental organizations and his Government had concluded an agreement on the holding of seminars and training courses to assist Soviet personnel working in organizations that addressed the problems of refugees and displaced persons. There was a possibility of opening a permanent UNHCR office in the Soviet Union to start a direct dialogue between UNHCR and the relevant Soviet bodies. His Government looked forward to enhanced cooperation with UNHCR both at the bilateral and the regional level.

(Mr. Imanaliev, USSR)

56. His delegation was pleased that the Office was giving greater attention to practical humanitarian measures for those forced to flee their homes. The Soviet Union endorsed the growing emphasis on voluntary repatriation or resettlement, but recognized the need to eliminate the root causes for those massive flows. UNHCR's policy on preventive measures, which would enable such problems to be nipped in the bud, deserved full support.

57. The Soviet Union knew first-hand about displaced persons and, indeed, displaced peoples. Many of his country's peoples, deported during the Stalinist period from their ancestral homelands, had not been rehabilitated until the perestroika period. Today, following the restoration of democracy, national, ethnic and religious passions had given rise to hundreds of thousands of internal migrants, a phenomenon that had increasingly been discussed in the Security Council and the General Assembly and to which UNHCR and the international community must give greater attention.

58. Mr. HUSAIN (Iraq) said that his delegation supported the humanitarian efforts being made by UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations, as described in the Secretary-General's report on humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees and displaced persons (A/46/612), inasmuch as they addressed a problem of a purely humanitarian character and sought to bring an end to the suffering of those who had been victims of the political objectives of certain parties acting on various pretexts and under various influences. His delegation had hoped, however, that the report would make reference to the sustained and earnest efforts made by the Government of Iraq and to its cooperation with the organizations in question despite the enormous difficulties caused by the destruction of Iraq's infrastructure and by the lack of resources due to an economic embargo that was incompatible with all humanitarian principles and values and violated the most elementary human rights.

59. The problems of the Iraqis as a people, including those who were refugees, stemmed from the unlawful economic sanctions imposed on the country under United States pressure and in the name of the United Nations. The Government of his country had taken effective measures to help its citizens and to encourage them to return to their homes. Those measures had been taken on the basis of the Government's sense of responsibility and duty towards its citizens, its concern to normalize the situation and its awareness of the difficult conditions experienced by civilians and of the fact that they had been victims of the circumstances of which all were well aware.

60. At the international level, Iraq had signed the Memorandum of Understanding of 18 April 1991 with the Executive Delegate of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Humanitarian Programme, in paragraph 2 of which it had welcomed United Nations efforts to promote the return of displaced persons and to take humanitarian measures to avert new flows of refugees. Iraq and the United Nations had agreed that those measures had the aim of ensuring the safety of the refugees and of providing humanitarian assistance to them so that they might resume their normal lives.

(Mr. Husain, Iraq)

While Iraq supported such efforts, it would like to stress the humanitarian character of the Memorandum of Understanding. It should not be abused for political ends that had no relation to its worthy purpose, it should not be used for the purpose of intervening in Iraq's internal affairs, and the activities carried out under its terms must respect Iraq's security, sovereignty and independence. Any abuse of the agreement would create a precedent that could be applied to any other country in the future. The measures taken by the Government of Iraq at the domestic level had included the issuance of a number of decisions concerning amnesty, which extended even to those who had instigated disturbances and sedition, with a view to facilitating the return of those citizens who had fled under incitement or intimidation.

61. His delegation agreed with the statement made in paragraph 32 of the Secretary-General's report to the effect that, given the number of humanitarian crises demanding the urgent attention of the international community and the very limited resources available to meet them, it was neither just nor practical to continue to request funding for a country that was capable of feeding its people and seeing that their needs were met. The report referred to the adoption of Security Council resolution 706 (1991), which permitted the sale of $1.6-billion worth of petroleum. His delegation did not agree that the arrangements set out in that resolution could be used in order to meet humanitarian needs in Iraq. The amount established would not meet the needs identified by the Executive Delegate in his reports on that matter, and the complex mechanism established by the resolution constituted an encroachment on Iraq's sovereignty, on its resources and on its oil wealth, thereby making the resolution almost impossible to implement from the practical point of view.

62. While the presence in Iraq of more than 30,000 Iranian refugees involved the Government expenditure of more than $100 million a year and the equivalent of another $500,000 a month was required in order to provide them with basic necessities, Iraq was not receiving any assistance in that regard from international governmental or non-governmental organizations. Even after the aggression and the imposition of the economic embargo, Iraq was continuing to assume such burdens without assistance. The Iraqi authorities were providing all possible assistance to the representatives of UNHCR and of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Iraq in order to facilitate the resettlement of some of those refugees in third countries or their return to Iran in accordance with their own desires and without interference from the Iraqi authorities.

63. Under the supervision of UNHCR, some of those refugees had been resettled in the Scandinavian countries. More than 1,600 of them had returned to Iran between 28 September and 3 October 1991 before the process had been halted at the request of the Iranian Government, which sought to dispatch a commission to scrutinize their papers. The UNHCR office in Baghdad had been informed of

(Mr. Husain, Iraq)

that request, and the Iraqi Government was awaiting the arrival of the Iranian commission. The Iraqi Government had requested UNHCR to participate in the procedure.

64. Iraq remained ready to cooperate fully with humanitarian organizations, and particularly with UNHCR, in overcoming the obstacles to solving the problems of displaced persons and refugees on a purely humanitarian basis.

65. Mr. SUKAYRI (Jordan) said that his country, which had experienced three influxes of refugees since the Palestine tragedy of 1948, fully understood both the plight of refugees and the nature of the burdens imposed on the receiving countries. The problem was further aggravated by the fact that most of the host countries were poor and suffered from manifold economic problems.

66. The international community's understanding of the plight of the Palestine refugees in 1948 had prompted the General Assembly to establish the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which had, since that time, worked tirelessly for refugee welfare and training. The responsibilities of the Agency had grown in the wake of the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, which had given rise to a further wave of refugees compelled to leave their homes in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for Jordan and neighbouring countries. It had also assumed additional responsibilities with the onset of the 1991 Gulf crisis and the return to Jordan - to their host countries, and chiefly of large numbers of Palestinians, residents of Kuwait and other Gulf States - most of whom had been of refugee origin.

67. The United Nations had found it necessary to be in a constant state of alert to cope with emergency flows of large numbers of refugees. Such a case had arisen in 1991, when his country had taken in large numbers of former residents of Kuwait and Iraq of various nationalities who had been forced to return to their home countries by way of Jordan. There had been more than 1 million such refugees, and Jordan, despite its economic difficulties, had provided them with shelter, food and health care, as well as other services, until transport could be provided for their repatriation. Jordan had received a certain amount of assistance from the industrialized countries towards meeting some of the costs involved.

68. While UNHCR had achieved the goal of repatriation in some parts of the world, such as southern Africa, Afghanistan and Central America, efforts should be redoubled and the Office provided with greater resources to enable it to be equally successful in others. Although repatriation was one of the most important goals, it was even more important to eliminate the root causes of the refugee problem, namely regional conflicts and civil strife, on the one hand, and natural disasters, famine and poverty, on the other.

69. The end of the cold war had helped to attenuate regional conflicts, and the world seemed to be progressing towards greater democracy and greater political liberalism, which might replace conflict and war with dialogue and

(Mr. Sukayri, Jordan)

negotiations. While it was impossible for natural disasters to be prevented, poverty, famine and low standards of living could be addressed through development. The international community, and particularly the advanced industrialized countries, therefore had a responsibility to promote development in the poorer countries, whether through the United Nations system or through bilateral and regional cooperation programmes. His delegation commended UNHCR for its efforts to establish a closer link between assistance to refugees and development assistance from international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

70. Mr. LAPOUGE (France) said that his delegation fully endorsed the statement on agenda item 97 made by the Netherlands on behalf of the 12 States Members of the European Community.

71. UNHCR was currently facing new and unprecedented challenges. The number of refugees continued to grow. The very meaning of the term "refugee" was in flux as a result of the appearance of new categories of displaced persons who did not necessarily fall within the scope of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The mixing of economic migrant flows with those of refugees in the strict sense of the word was cause for concern. There was, in addition, a new category of potential refugees, who were moving to neighbouring regions in response to nationalist, ethnic or religious tensions. His country wished therefore to reaffirm its support for the definition of refugee contained in the 1951 Convention.

72. UNHCR had responded dynamically to those challenges. It had been able to find sufficient funding from traditional and new donors and was endeavouring to carry out its work in an efficient manner. It had also carefully analysed its mandate. In that connection, he welcomed the sensible conclusions contained in the report of the Working Group on Solutions and Protection (see A/46/12/Add.1, para. 22).

73. His country attached particular importance to coordination of operational activities for refugees and their allocation to the various organizations involved. In view of its mandate and resources, UNHCR could not by itself take the action necessary to prevent refugee flows and encourage voluntary repatriation. UNDP should consequently be more involved in efforts to achieve lasting solutions.

74. That comprehensive approach was first applied during the implementation of the agreement concluded at the International Conference on Central American Refugees; it should be encouraged in other regions.

75. Promotion of political, social and economic solutions went hand in hand with strengthening the emergency capacity of the United Nations system. His country welcomed the High Commissioner's proposals to set up teams of

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technical specialists to be deployed in emergency situations and to maintain an inventory of national experts and non-governmental organizations to be called upon as needed.

76. His delegation hoped that the General Assembly would endorse the appointment of a high-level official to assist the Secretary-General in responding to emergencies (A/46/568, para. 31). The official would draw upon the capacity of existing operational organizations, including UNHCR, and would coordinate their activities, thus increasing their efficiency.

77. Strongly attached to the tradition of asylum and the defense of human rights, his Government had scrupulously applied the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; moreover, UNHCR representatives were closely involved in reviewing the claims of asylum-seekers in France. Over the past two years, his country had tripled the amounts it provided to the national agencies which reviewed refugee-status claims. The time period for examining cases had also been reduced substantially.

78. France had raised by 20 per cent its 1992 contribution to UNHCR; it would also be increasing its contribution to UNDP refugee activities.

79. His Government was committed to ensuring that the European Community's plan to eliminate border restrictions would not violate the rights of refugees.

80. During the Gulf crisis, the United Nations had shown that, when necessary, Member States were able to agree without delay on immediate United Nations assistance to those in need. France paid tribute to the role played by UNHCR in the resettlement and repatriation of the affected populations of southern Iraq. With regard to the situation in Cambodia, it was important to recognize the primary role of UNHCR in carrying out repatriation activities in conditions of dignity and security.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.